

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 24, 2011

Washington, DC – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) strongly condemns the coordinated raids by Iranian authorities this weekend on numerous Baha'i homes and the arrests of more than a dozen Baha'is who have been part of an effort to provide higher education to Baha'i youth because they are prevented from attending universities in Iran.

"The Iranian government will stop at nothing in its shameless persecution of the Baha'is in Iran," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. "It's not enough that authorities already have a policy in place preventing Baha'is from attending Iranian universities—the government is now systematically trying to dismantle the Baha'i community's internal initiative to ensure that its youth have the opportunity to get an education beyond high school," said Mr. Leo.

On Saturday, in at least four different cities throughout the country, Iranian authorities raided approximately 30 homes of Baha'is who were part of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education (BIHE), a 24 year-old effort by the Baha'i community to educate its youth because the Iranian government does not permit Baha'is to pursue undergraduate or graduate studies. Reportedly, more than a dozen Baha'is have been arrested and a number of books, documents, computers, and other materials associated with the BIHE have been seized by Iranian authorities. It has been more than 10 years since Iranian authorities conducted a similar campaign against the BIHE.

"Iranian authorities continue to hold the Baha'i community's seven leaders in Iranian prisons and now, with these arrests, the number of Baha'is currently imprisoned is approaching 100, a number not seen in more than two decades," said Mr. Leo. "The United States and international community must aggressively speak out and condemn such actions and pressure the Iranian government to allow the new Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran to investigate this and other blatant violations," said Mr. Leo.

Since 1999, the U.S. State Department has designated Iran as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. USCIRF has recommended in 2011 that Iran again be designated as a CPC. In its annual report issued last month, USCIRF urged the U.S. government to continue to sanction Iranian government agencies and officials responsible for particularly severe violations of human rights, including freedom of religion or belief. To date, travel bans and asset freezes have been imposed by the U.S. government on 10 Iranian officials.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy

recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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